



Crime Scene Unit
Narcotics Standard Operating Procedures
Houston Forensic Science Center

Narcotics Evidence Standard Operating Procedure



1. Introduction

This standard operating procedure (SOP) is a supplemental SOP to the Crime Scene Unit (CSU) SOP and specifically addresses the documentation and submission of narcotics evidence by crime scene investigators (CSIs).

On January 26, 2021, the Houston Police Department issued Memo No. 21-0126-015 stating: *When any crime scene is processed by the Houston Forensic Science Center, Crime Scene Unit (CSU) and suspected narcotics are found, it will be photographed and documented by CSU personnel prior to seizure. CSU will bag and turn the substance over to Houston Police personnel for evidence submission and preparation of appropriate testing requests.*

2. Narcotics at the scene

If suspected narcotics are found at a Houston Police Department (HPD) scene, the CSI shall document the location of the suspected narcotics in their photographs and in their notes. For safety reasons, CSIs shall not open containers such as pill bottles, baggies, etc. to photograph, document or count the contents. Refer to Section 1.2 of the CSU SOP for additional information on Narcan.

Suspected narcotics found on scene are not collected by CSU as evidence. This is the responsibility of HPD officers and/or detectives.

Suspected narcotics documented for any non-HPD agency will be handed over to that agency's representative before the CSI leaves the scene.

Narcotics at the Vehicle Examination Building (VEB)

2.1.1. Documenting and packaging suspected narcotics found in a vehicle

When suspected narcotics are found in a vehicle at the VEB, the following steps shall be followed:

- Photograph narcotic evidence, in place, in the vehicle.
 - If distributable weights of narcotics are located at the VEB, the CSI shall contact the On-Call Supervisor. The supervisor will make arrangements with the HPD Narcotics Division to collect the narcotics at the VEB.
- Package and seal the collected evidence in a clear plastic bag or tube. Suspected narcotics of different varieties shall be packaged separate from one another. For example, if possible marijuana, unknown pills, and a glass pipe are found in a vehicle, three packages will be created. One for the possible marijuana, one for unknown pills and one for the glass pipe.
- Label the clear plastic bag with:
 - Name
 - Case number
 - Date
 - Your name and payroll



2.1.2. Weighing and submission of suspected narcotics

After the evidence has been sealed in a clear plastic bag or tube, it is ready to be weighed.

- o Prior to weighing, make sure the balance is zeroed.
o Weigh the sealed plastic bag or tube containing the suspected narcotics and record the weight to the nearest gram. Document this weight on the sealed plastic bag and in the case notes.
- If evidence does not fit on the weigh pan, place a riser on the weigh pan and re-zero (tare) the balance.
- The Scout Pro SP202 reads to the hundredth of a gram (0.01 grams); however, the gross weight should be reported to the nearest gram. The decimal place weights should be omitted.
- The Scout Pro 202 has a weight capacity of 200 grams. If the display gives an error message, the item likely weighs more than 200 grams. Notify a CSU supervisor. The supervisor will make arrangements for an HPD narcotics officer to retrieve the evidence.
o Create a supplement in the Houston Police Departments Records Management System (RMS) under the "Drug" or "Article" tab where the weight and the item description will be recorded. (Drug tab is used for all narcotics and the Article tab is used for all paraphernalia.) The code VEB is used under Involvement (instead of EVD). Once the supplement is created, submit the supplement like other RMS entries for evidence.
o If paraphernalia is collected, this is not weighed and X.XXg is used in the weight box of the RMS supplement.
o Print a copy of the RMS supplement for the case record.
o Place the sealed clear plastic bag inside a designated HPD Narcotics envelope, seal the envelope and fill out the front portion. An HPD Narcotics slip (copy of the front of the envelope) must also be completed.
- Suspected narcotics of different varieties must be packaged in separate HPD Narcotics envelopes. For example, if possible marijuana, unknown pills and a glass pipe are found in a vehicle, three packages will be created. One for the possible marijuana, one for unknown pills and one for the glass pipe.
- Use the following wording for submission:

Table with 2 columns: Suspected narcotic type, Description on packaging. Rows include Marijuana, Liquid marijuana, Other narcotics (unknown pills, liquids, powders), and Paraphernalia.

- Liquids shall be packaged in the same container in which they were collected and placed in a plastic bag or tube in a manner that prevents spillage. If the liquid items cannot be packaged in a way to prevent spillage, the CSI will contact the On-Call Supervisor who will then contact the Narcotics Division to arrange for collection.
o Review the HPD Narcotics envelope information and the corresponding HPD Narcotics slip; Ensure the two documents match.



- Make a copy of each HPD Narcotics slip for the CSU case record and attach the original HPD Narcotics slip to the front of the HPD Narcotics envelope.
- Document the transfer of the narcotics to the drop box using a chain of custody form. This form will remain in the case record.
- Fill out HFSC VEB Narcotics Log indicating the time, date, case number, package description and name of CSI dropping the evidence.
- Place the HPD Narcotics envelope with the attached HPD Narcotics slip in the HPD drop box.
 - If the case contains more than one package, use a rubber band to hold the packages together prior to dropping them in the drop box.
 - If the evidence will not fit in the drop box or if the drop box is full, contact the on-call CSU Supervisor who will then contact the HPD Narcotics Division to arrange for collection.
- The final CSU report shall include the recorded approximate gross weight.

2.1.3. Balance information

A Scout-Pro SP202 balance is available at the VEB. HFSC's Logistics and Equipment Division will perform monthly checks on the balance and coordinate annual balance calibrations.

The balance should not be moved. If it is moved, the balance should be placed out-of-service until the Logistics and Equipment Division conducts a performance check.